

Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements – Productivity Commission Issues Paper

The Mid Murray Council covers a geographic area encompassing 6,266 square kilometres stretching from the town of Mannum in the Murraylands to Morgan/Cadell in the Riverland. The Council area includes 16 towns, covers 220 kilometres of the Murray River and has a population of 8,600. A map showing the location of the Mid Murray Council is attached.

In January 2014, Mid Murray Council assisted various State Agencies and the Country Fire Service in relation to bushfires north of Morgan, in and around Rockleigh and Eden Valley. The Eden Valley fire involved over 26,000 hectares and the Mid Murray Council was significantly involved in the recovery, particularly for residents within the fire effected area. Council in conjunction with Mid Murray Support Services established a Relief Centre and appointed a Relief Coordinator to assist and be the focal point for residents' enquiries, co-ordination with a plethora of Agencies and to be able to provide information and assistance as required.

A Mid Murray and Barossa Local Recovery Committee was established in conjunction with the State Recovery Office and has attendees from a number of State Government Departments, Agencies, residents and organisations. The Mid Murray Council incurred around \$50,000 in co-ordination efforts, repair of Council assets (which was only minor) and recovery assistance to residents affected by particularly the Eden Valley Bushfire (disposal of stock, disposal of burnt materials, co-ordination of the provision of replenishment of water for water tanks, co-ordination of the establishment of BlazeAid and other assistance).

It is recognised that it is difficult to obtain a balance between mitigation, resilience and recovery. Council considers that funding for mitigation would assist in ensuring that financial assistance to landowners, businesses and Council in the event of a disaster would be decreased. Assistance for response and recovery plans, community education and other strategies would help the Mid Murray Council in planning, preparing and implementing mitigation measures, (in conjunction with the Zone Emergency Management Committee) to lessen the impact of disasters such as bushfires.

Notwithstanding this, often the first contact by residents in the event of a disaster; be it flood or bushfire, is the local Council. This is irrespective of any Committees or Plans that have been established. Often, the media contact the Mayor of the local Council first for comment on the disaster and what has been undertaken in terms of recovery.

It is strongly considered that consideration should be given to provisions to financially assist Councils with recovery strategies, coordination with Departments and Agencies, and the provision of information and assistance with health and mental health of those affected by the disaster. It is contended that the Council is best placed to be the co-ordinating body for such assistance in the event of a disaster.

However, particularly in regional and rural areas, given increasing legislative demands and requirements from particularly State Governments, and infrastructure maintenance and upgrade requirements, such Councils often do not have the financial resources to meet such recovery costs and provide recovery services. The Mid Murray Council has the second largest road length of 68 Councils in South Australia (3,073 kilometres of unsealed roads and 306 kilometres of sealed roads), 52 shack areas along the Murray River and a range of other demands for services and programs. Financially, the Mid Murray Council does not have the resources to provide such recovery assistance, notwithstanding the need at the time of such a bushfire.

Accordingly, it is considered that financial assistance for mitigation and particularly for recovery assistance for Councils in the event of a disaster should be considered and implemented.

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